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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CA](#)  
SUBJECT: Canadian Auto Workers Union Gets New Leader

Ref: (A) Toronto 123 (B) Toronto 175

Sensitive But Unclassified - Please Protect Accordingly.

11. (U) SUMMARY: Ken Lewenza, current president of the CAW shop in Windsor, has been formally endorsed by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) executive board, by other senior officers and staff, and most importantly by outgoing President Buzz Hargrove to replace Hargrove, who has announced that he will retire before September 15. Lewenza's official confirmation as CAW leader will occur at a special convention of the 250,000-member union in the next two months. END SUMMARY.

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The Presumptive Future Leader  
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12. (U) Ken Lewenza was born in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in 1955, and was raised primarily in a housing project in the city's west side. He attended a local high school until grade 10, when he withdrew to work at a local gas station. Lewenza's father, Bill Lewenza, was a longtime steward and committeeman of CAW Local 444 in Windsor. Lewenza is now divorced and has two sons. His eldest son, Ken Lewenza Jr., is a Windsor city councilor. Lewenza started at Chrysler Corporation in 1972, where he became a member of the local CAW union. Lewenza advanced quickly through the ranks of the union, while holding many in-plant and local executive positions. Lewenza became president of the CAW Local in Windsor in 1991, representing union members from a diverse range of employment sectors including auto parts manufacturers and casinos. Lewenza chaired the Chrysler Canada national bargaining committee, and served as the union's chief negotiator. He also served on the union's national executive board.

13. (U) On July 3, Lewenza announced his intention to seek the presidency of the CAW, replacing the retiring Hargrove. In the following days, Hargrove, as well as the national executive board of the union, endorsed Lewenza. The other declared candidates for the position, Hemi Mitic and Tom Collins, both assistants to Hargrove, withdrew from the race after failing to receive an official endorsement. The board and senior officers also announced their support for Peter Kennedy to replace current secretary-treasurer Jim O'Neil when he retires in 2009. The recommendation from the CAW executive board should secure the presidency for Lewenza, although the official outcome will be determined by some 800 delegates who will attend the CAW convention. The CAW leadership's unanimous support for Lewenza disappointed many union activists, who were anticipating a contested campaign. In the aftermath of the endorsement, several union members claimed that senior leaders pressured them to support Lewenza and Kennedy.

14. (U) Approximately 20,000 jobs have been eliminated in Canada's auto sector since 2000, many of which were held by CAW members.

Ontario's competitive advantage in the industry continues to diminish, as the region struggles to retain its auto manufacturing jobs despite high production costs (ref A). Union members remain concerned about the ongoing battle with General Motors over the planned closure of the Oshawa truck plant, which will result in the loss of thousands more manufacturing jobs (ref B). Lewenza recently rejected suggestions that it would be necessary for the next CAW leader to become more flexible in the union's negotiations.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Observers and auto industry analysts suggest Lewenza shares Buzz Hargrove's leadership and negotiation style, and will pursue many of the same goals. Lewenza has publically endorsed Hargrove's refusal to compromise during negotiations with the Detroit "Big Three" auto manufacturers, stating he would never make the kinds of wage and benefit concessions agreed to by the U.S. United Auto Workers union. Lewenza also stated that he planned to continue with the major policies developed under Hargrove's leadership. Lewenza will assume the CAW presidency at a crucial time. The rapid decline of consumer demand and of the manufacturing sector in North America will pose significant challenges for the union, whose influence in the auto industry has decreased significantly in recent years. It is unlikely that Lewenza will be able to remain inflexible on negotiations, as he faces increasing industry demands for wage concessions and heightened pressure from union members to protect Ontario's remaining auto jobs. END COMMENT.

NAY